

Understanding Elaboration

To tell a good story, give clear directions, or make someone you disagree with see your side of the argument, you will need to do more than give general ideas. You will need to give specific information. You will need to support your ideas with descriptive details, examples, anecdotes, facts, or statistics. In other words, you will need to **elaborate**.

In the first example below, the writer simply makes a claim without providing any true elaboration. The revised passage is more convincing because it includes two points that support the writer's claim: a fact (or valid observation), and a personal anecdote (or brief story).

Unelaborated Idea Our school should set aside money in its budget to fund a magazine that publishes student writing and artwork. Students want this kind of magazine.

Elaborated Idea Our school should set aside money in its budget to fund a magazine that publishes student writing and artwork. Although many students, either through class assignments or on their own initiative, write stories and poems, paint, draw, and photograph, they don't have a place to exhibit their work. Because I'm not enrolled in an art class, for example, no one at school can see the photographs I take in my spare time. A school-sponsored arts magazine would enable me to share my work with others.

EXERCISE Each passage below contains a type of elaboration. Read each passage carefully and identify the type of elaboration it contains by writing *descriptive details*, *examples*, *anecdotes*, *facts*, or *statistics*, on the line that follows. A passage may contain more than one type of elaboration. Underline the words and phrases in the passage that provide elaboration.

Sample I understand the arguments against wearing fur and have decided to wear one anyway. Not only does fur solve, more efficiently than any other substance known to man, the need for warmth, it has also been with us for hundreds if not thousands of years.
Yona Zeldis McDonough, "Sisters Under the Skin"

Answer I understand the arguments against wearing fur and have decided to wear one anyway. Not only does fur solve, more efficiently than any other substance known to man, the need for warmth, it has also been with us for hundreds if not thousands of years.

Facts

1. There is one profound difference between heroin and nicotine addiction. Tobacco kills 80 times as many people in this country. About 320,000 Americans die every year as a result of using tobacco products, while 4,000 die from the effects of heroin and related drugs.

Anthony Lewis, "Merchants of Death"

Revising with Style**LESSON****28**

Continued

2. Are power rackets good for tennis? The weekend player has certainly benefited from them. Their large "sweet spot" can compensate for poor vision, awkward footwork, and lapses in concentration.
Mark Mathabane, "A Plague on Tennis"
-
3. Fashions in names seem as arbitrary as fashions in carpet. One day everyone wants orange shag, then suddenly it's green berber.
Janet Simons, "The Name Reign: New Parents Balance the Trendy and Unique"
-
4. Yet to understand just how different this place is, one has to see a "normal" coffee shop, such as the one in the modernistic building of concrete and glass that we visited the same day. Inside neon lights flicker, casting a ghostly light on the aluminum tables and chairs covered with plastic.
Slavenka Drakulić, "Pizza in Warsaw, Torte in Prague"
-
5. Eager to counter the many charges of vacuousness and puffery that have plagued it, MTV has also aired public service programs about political, social, and environmental issues, even winning a prestigious Peabody Award for its two-hour retrospective on the '80s, "Decade."
George Varga, "Is It MTV, or Is It 'Empty-V'?"
-